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just the FACTs

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.

MEDIA QUESTIONS

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Aircraft at the South Florida Water Management District

A fleet of three helicopters, one turbo-prop airplane and a seasoned crew of five pilots serve the District's mission to manage and protect South Florida's water resources and to fulfill federal mandates for environmental restoration. The aircraft are used for Everglades research and data collection, maintenance of canals and flood control structures, regulatory inspections, water quality monitoring, vegetation management and government business.

- In compliance with state and federal law, the District conducts research, environmental monitoring and regulatory activities throughout the agency's 18,000-square-mile area. This comprises almost 1,900 miles of canals and levees, 2,200 water control structures, 52,000 acres of stormwater treatment areas and 900,000 acres of water conservation areas.
- Every day, an average of four to five helicopter missions are completed by the District's flight operations team, totaling more than 3,000 hours of flight time each year and 1,600 individual missions.
 - Flights provide access to environmentally sensitive areas and landing sites too remote or impractical to reach by land.
 - Helicopters also serve in emergencies, including aerial inspections following severe storms for flood control and to identify obstructions in local waterways – tasks that could never be conducted by land in a timely and comprehensive way.
- Annual operating expenses for all District aircraft is \$1.2 million, with a total annual budget of \$2.2 million.
 - If contracted to outside vendors, the District's annual flight operations budget would total an estimated \$3.23 million.
 - Assessments consistently show that District aircraft operations provide a substantial savings to Florida taxpayers.
- For more than 40 years, aircraft use at the District has been governed by the State of Florida's Aircraft Use Policy and closely managed by the District's own Travel Policy.
 - All flights must be approved by District management.
 - District policy on aircraft use is regularly reviewed and was most recently updated in August 2005.
- The District's 27-year-old King Air flies into 21 locations, of which only 7 are serviced by commercial airlines.
 - Each airplane flight is cost-justified against commercial air travel rates when traveling to locations serviced by commercial flights.
 - For example, round-trip tickets from West Palm Beach to Tallahassee cost approximately \$700. Direct operating cost for the King Air making the same round trip is \$1058. With average aircraft loading (consistently 3.5 passengers per trip for the past 20 years), the round-trip cost per passenger is \$302.
 - State audits have confirmed a direct operating cost of \$516.50 per hour with a total fixed & direct operating cost of \$727.43 per hour.



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